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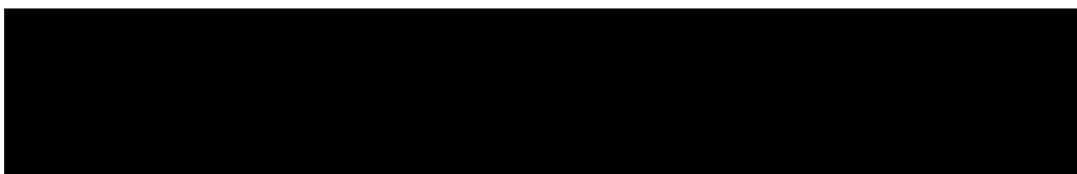
MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Morocco

Opposition Parties May Join Government

Over the past year, King Hassan has given several indications that he is once again interested in holding parliamentary elections. As a prelude to such elections, the King will make his third try since 1971 to entice opposition political parties into a coalition government.

In a press conference last September, Hassan expressed his hope for an elected parliament in Morocco by October 1975. He envisaged an interim coalition cabinet, including opposition leaders, as part of the six to seven months of preparation required to establish election lists, laws, and districts.

Given this general timetable, King Hassan may now be talking, either directly or through an intermediary, with opposition party leaders about the formation of a provisional government. Rumors circulated in Rabat last month that a mini-cabinet shuffle would occur around the first of the year and be followed eventually by bringing various political leaders into the government. Hassan might use the beginning of the Muslim lunar year, January 13, to announce cabinet changes. A likely target date for the formation of a coalition cabinet would be March 3, the 14th anniversary of Hassan's accession to the throne.

The crucial question is whether the opposition parties are willing to join the government on the King's terms. The frequency of party congresses and gatherings this fall suggests that opposition leaders are trying to revitalize their parties for another round of dialogue with the palace. Although such talks could again break down over conditions for sharing power, the parties, which have been on the sidelines for more than a decade, may be in such straits that this time they will succumb to the lure of holding office.

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For his part, King Hassan is in a strong position vis-a-vis the opposition. In his campaign to acquire Spanish Sahara, he has successfully played on the strong irredentist sentiment shared by many Moroccans, and thus created an atmosphere of national unity. Given the strong support on this issue he received from most political leaders, it would be relatively easy for him to open a substantive dialogue with the parties. Should the present party leaders prove unwilling to come to terms, the King may try to attract younger, less prominent party figures who might prove more amenable. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Ghana

Ewe Coup Plot Shelved

The plans of a group of dissident officers of the Ewe tribe to overthrow Colonel Acheampong's military regime apparently have been shelved indefinitely. The plotters reportedly decided that their activities are monitored too closely by Acheampong's security services and that they cannot count on the backing of any of the army's main troop units which are all commanded by non-Ewe officers. Moreover, the two senior Ewe officers on the ruling military council seem to have dissociated themselves from the plotting.

There are no indications, however, that the main group of conspirators has disbanded. They apparently still entertain hopes of eventually organizing a successful coup. For now, the Ewe dissidents seem to have little choice but to bide their time while trying to broaden their support in the armed forces.

Meanwhile, Acheampong, who will mark his third anniversary in power on January 13, may be considering some positive steps to curry favor with the Ewe tribe. He is said to be studying the possibility of appointing an Ewe officer to command one of the army's infantry battalions. The unit in question is located far upcountry from the capital of Accra and is not strategically placed to pose a coup threat.

Acheampong's political troubles are far from over, however. He is still faced with criticism in the officer corps for his erratic personal behavior and his handling of Ghana's pressing economic problems. Acheampong is trying to improve his image, but Ghana's worsening economic situation--like that of many African countries--will probably continue to deteriorate in 1975 because of the oil price squeeze and inflation. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/CONTROLLED DISSEM)

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India

Waiting for a Decision

Mrs. Gandhi apparently is still considering the possibility of early parliamentary elections.

The recently concluded winter session of parliament was dominated by charges of corruption against Prime Minister Gandhi's government. Throughout December it seemed likely she would seek a renewed mandate from the public and call general elections in early spring, cutting short by one year the maximum five year term. While refusing to commit herself to a decision, Mrs. Gandhi has taken steps to keep her options open. Units of her Congress Party in the states are assessing electoral prospects, holding strategy sessions, and collecting campaign funds. Efforts to redraw constituency lines to reflect population shifts in accord with the 1971 census have been intensified.

Mrs. Gandhi's ambivalence toward the timing of elections reflects the well-balanced pros and cons of the situation. Factors favoring an early race include:

-- A current wave of optimism about the 1975 crop prospects, due largely to early snowfalls in the Himalayas that will be important in irrigating the breadbasket states of north India.

-- The oppositions' lack of cohesion and inability at this time to mount a credible challenge in more than a few states.

-- Indications of the re-emergence of factions along right and left lines in the Congress Party which, if allowed to grow, could affect party unity by 1976.

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-- The opportunity to ease the tense political situation in Bihar by holding simultaneous national and state elections there.

The above reasons are not compelling, however, and Mrs. Gandhi may well prefer to ride out the full five year term. She would thus be willing to take the chance that:

-- The economic situation through 1975 will not worsen, and might even improve, compared to 1974 when India felt the double blow of the oil crisis and mediocre crops.

-- The odds of retaining a parliamentary majority in 1976 elections remain high, even though her party might lose some seats.

-- The opposition parties, which are far apart on ideological grounds, probably will not be able to form an effective united front, even though association with the revered reformer, J. P. Narayan, economic discontent, and outright evidence of corruption in the government provide them with an unusual opportunity to try to undermine the Congress Party.

Adding to the dilemma over timing of the next election are widespread rumors that members of the Congress Party were behind the unsolved murder last week of railways minister L. N. Mishra. The government was embarrassed by his involvement in an import license scandal. To some observers, Mrs. Gandhi's address at a memorial service for Mishra on Tuesday sounded like a typical campaign speech, and the Congress Party whip in parliament told US embassy officials in New Delhi that he was almost sure she would call a "snap" election. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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